

# **Understanding what makes life good for children in care and care leavers –**

## **Building relationships and a sense of belonging**

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**bright spots**

# What makes the difference?

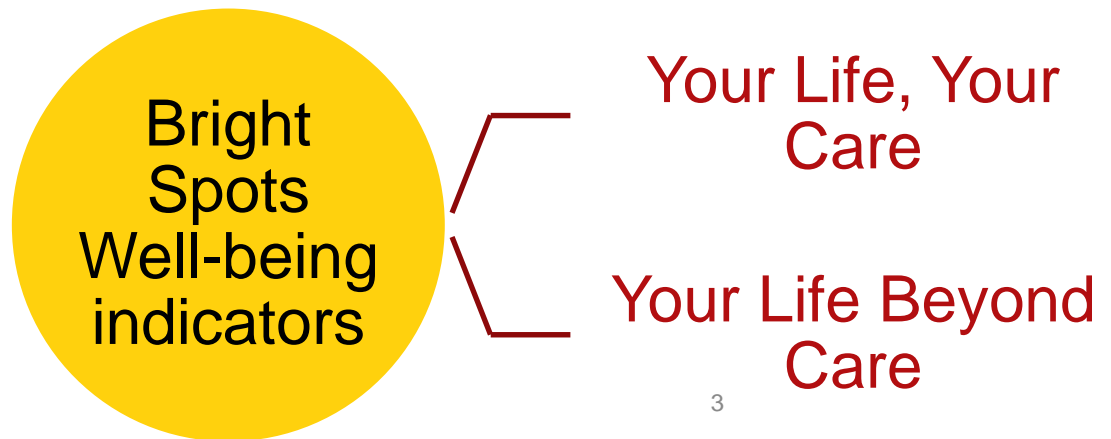


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJChYEPw1h4&list=PL9Rub76Tc1daLz5DahSOKjRqRBxvAyo8z&index=2>

# Young people at the centre

- Currently official statistics focus on adult viewpoints,
  - objective outcomes measures - where children live, education results.
- None of this tells us about young people's own viewpoints:
  - are they happy, safe and feel they are doing well?
- Bright Spots programme seek to address these gaps
- Helps LAs systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers about the things that are important to them.

**Subjective Well-being:**  
Feeling good and doing well at both individual and interpersonal levels



# About Bright Spots

Partnership between Coram Voice & the University of Oxford supported by the Hadley Trust to help LAs:

- Ensure views of children **influence service development & strategic thinking**, a key requisite of Ofsted
- **Share good practice** – encouraging learning and development with other local authorities

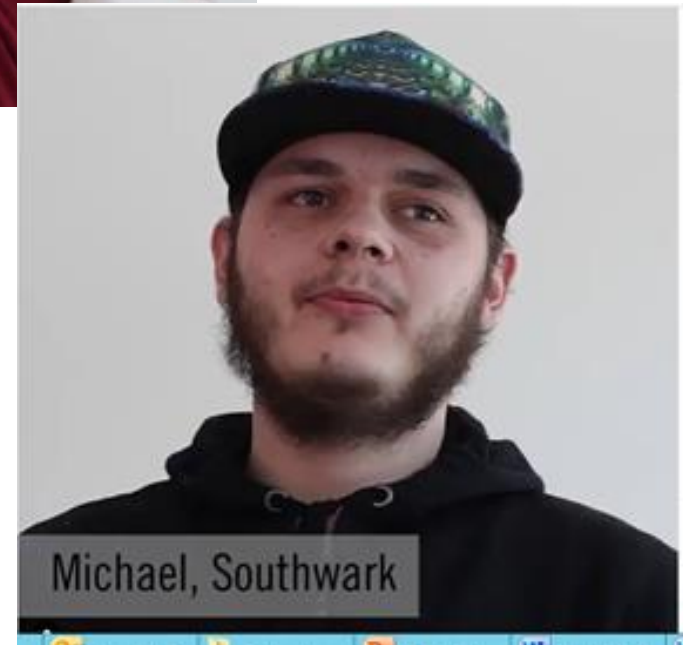
- **Identify how children and young people (CYP) feel**
- **Co-produced with CYP**
  - based on what 170 children in care and care leavers said was important to them
- **Strongly evidence based**
  - developed over 6 years of research.
  - comparative to national data
  - international literature reviews
  - piloting and cognitive interviews

# Central question



*What  
makes life  
good?*

# Instagram: *What makes life good?*



[https://www.instagram.com/p/BvwYAo-nlc2/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_button\\_share\\_sheet](https://www.instagram.com/p/BvwYAo-nlc2/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet)





People in your life who demonstrate that they care.

Relationships

Person who listens, says when done well, believes in you

Have emotional support

Have a partner and/or children

Feel settled

Where they live is right for them

Feel safe where they live & in neighbourhood

Coping financially

Day to day life

Access to internet & phone

Doing fun stuff

Meaningful day to day activities

Phones: keep memories; get info; reduce loneliness

Easy to contact leaving care worker

Life as a care leaver

Trust leaving care worker

Being treated the same or better than other young people

Involved in pathway planning

Explanation of why in care

Experience anxiety

Experiences of loneliness compared to peers aged 16-24

Happy with appearance

Positive/Negative feelings





# Survey distribution

- **Working group** set up to plan & coordinate distribution. Separate planning meetings and membership for in care and care leaver surveys.
- **Adapted to every local authority** – e.g. through schools, IROs, participation service
- **Supported** - Survey designed to be completed with an **trusted adult** supporting children to complete or facilitate access to survey
- **Quick and easy to complete** - Average time to complete 10 min
- **Online survey** – can be completed on any device connected to the internet
- **Anonymous & optional** - Participation and each question optional, but need to click through to end and submit for response to register.
- **Avoid stigmatising** - Ensure approach does not single children out.
- **Communicate widely** - Essential to disseminate information about the survey to all staff, carers etc. so they can encourage children to complete it.

# Your Life Your Care in Wales

- 40 LAs incl. 6 Welsh LAs have run the survey gathering over 10,000 responses – currently working with a further 10
- Pilot in 2018 of YLYC survey with 6 LAs developed with the support of the Welsh Children's Commissioner, Sally Holland funded by the Welsh Government
  - Run by Coram Voice in partnership with University of Bristol
  - Caerphilly, Cardiff, Flintshire, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Swansea
  - Linked to Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group

OUR LIVES, OUR CARE Wales 2018 [https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/bright\\_spots\\_-\\_wales\\_report\\_-\\_final\\_1.11.18\\_english.pdf](https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/bright_spots_-_wales_report_-_final_1.11.18_english.pdf)

EIN BYWYDAU NI, EIN GOFAL NI Cymru 2018 [https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/bright\\_spots\\_-\\_wales\\_report\\_-\\_final\\_1.11.18\\_cymraeg.pdf](https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/bright_spots_-_wales_report_-_final_1.11.18_cymraeg.pdf)

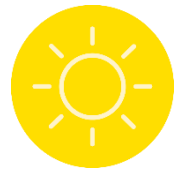
# Your Life Your Care Pilot – Wales 2018

*“The pilot survey was conducted to help local authorities, as corporate parents, to better understand what matters most to the children they are looking after and their thoughts and feelings about the care they receive. Each local authority involved in the survey has received a report tailored to their organisation. I call on local authorities to use the information wisely so it can influence how services are developed and delivered to meet children and young people’s needs and expectations.”*

**Huw Irranca-Davies AM**  
**Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care**

*“I championed this survey being undertaken here in Wales to make sure that ‘bright spots’ of practice can be highlighted and celebrated, and that the concerns of care experienced children here in Wales can be heard and, more importantly, addressed. Moreover, the views and experiences of children aged 16 and under are not routinely gathered and used for policy development, but this particular survey has allowed children from the age of 4 upwards to have their say on their care and well-being.”*

**Sally Holland Children’s Commissioner for Wales**



## Well-being means

### ...making sure that you have your rights

- Feel included in social workers decisions
- Think an adult has explained to them why they are in care
- Get to do the same things as their peers
- Know that they can speak to their social worker alone
- Know who their social worker is
- Have social workers who do not change
- Find it easy to contact their social workers

### ...being physically, mentally and emotionally healthy

- Were happy yesterday
- Are satisfied with life as a whole
- Feel the things that they do are worthwhile
- Are positive about the future
- Feel that life is getting better
- Do not worry about their feelings and behaviour or are supported if they worry
- Are happy with the way they look

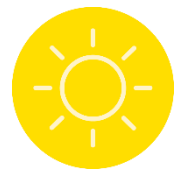
### ... having positive relationships at home and with my family and friends

- Have a trusted adult in their lives
- Trust the people they live with
- Feel that adults they live with notice how they are feeling
- Trust their social workers
- Are happy with how often they get to see their birth family
- Have a good friend
- Have a pet

### ... having an education, training, sports and play.

- Like school
- Have carers that take an interest in their education
- Get to have fun at weekends or do their own hobbies and activities
- Have access to the outdoors (woods, parks, beaches etc.)

**The 'Your Life Your Care' survey measures whether children and young people in care:**



## Well-being means

### ... being protected from abuse, harm and neglect

- Feel safe at home
- Are not afraid to go to school because of bullying
- Are supported with bullying
- Not made to feel different.

### ... being able to get involved and be part of my community.

- Get chances to be trusted or help out in school
- Get second chances

### ... having a healthy social life and enough money to live a healthy life.

- Get to do similar things to their friends
- Get to practice life skills (cooking, washing, budgeting)
- Have access to the internet at home

### ... having a good, healthy place to live.

- Feel settled where they live
- Like their bedrooms

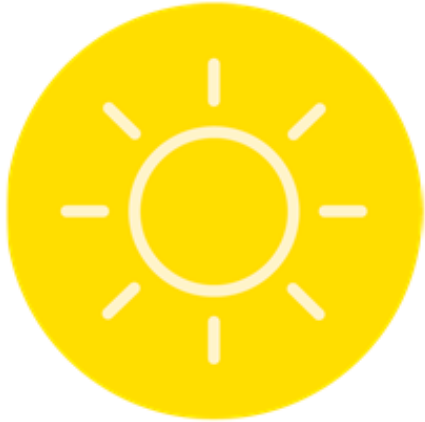
**The 'Your Life Your Care' survey measures whether children and young people in care:**



# Our lives our care – Wales 2018

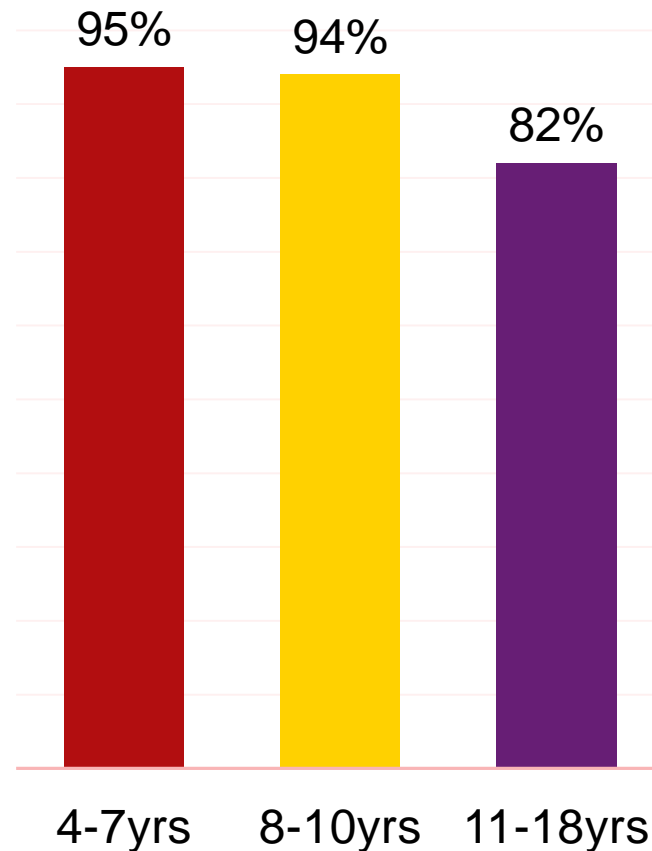
Age group	Boys	Girls	Prefer not to say	Total
11-18yrs	183	186	9	378 (55%)
8-10yrs	101	83	2	186 (27%)
4-7yrs	53	67	2	122 (18%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>337 (49%)</b>	<b>336 (49%)</b>	<b>13 (2%)</b>	<b>686 (100%)</b>

# Overall well-being



The majority of looked after children and young people in Wales had moderate to high subjective well-being.

High to moderate well-being



*I wish my carer had looked after me since the day I was born. People like me are very lucky.*  
11-18yrs

# Low well-being: 11-18yrs (secondary)



*Being in care is just years of broken promises until eventually you give up trying. (11-18yrs)*

- Disliking appearance: 7x more likely
- No trusted adult in their lives: 5x more likely
- Not settled in their placements: 4 x more likely
- Not one good friend: 3x more likely
- Girls 2x more likely and those with 5+ placements.

# Low well being: 8-10yrs



**11 (6%) low well-being**  
*negative responses to at least 3 survey questions*

- Did not know why they were in care
- Did not always feel settled in their placements
- worried about feelings or behaviour
- Did not like school and were afraid to go to school because of bullying
- Saw their mums, dads and siblings too little
- Did not have opportunities to explore the outdoors
- Did not know they could speak to their social worker in private or feel included in decisions made about their lives.

# Low well-being: 4-7 year olds



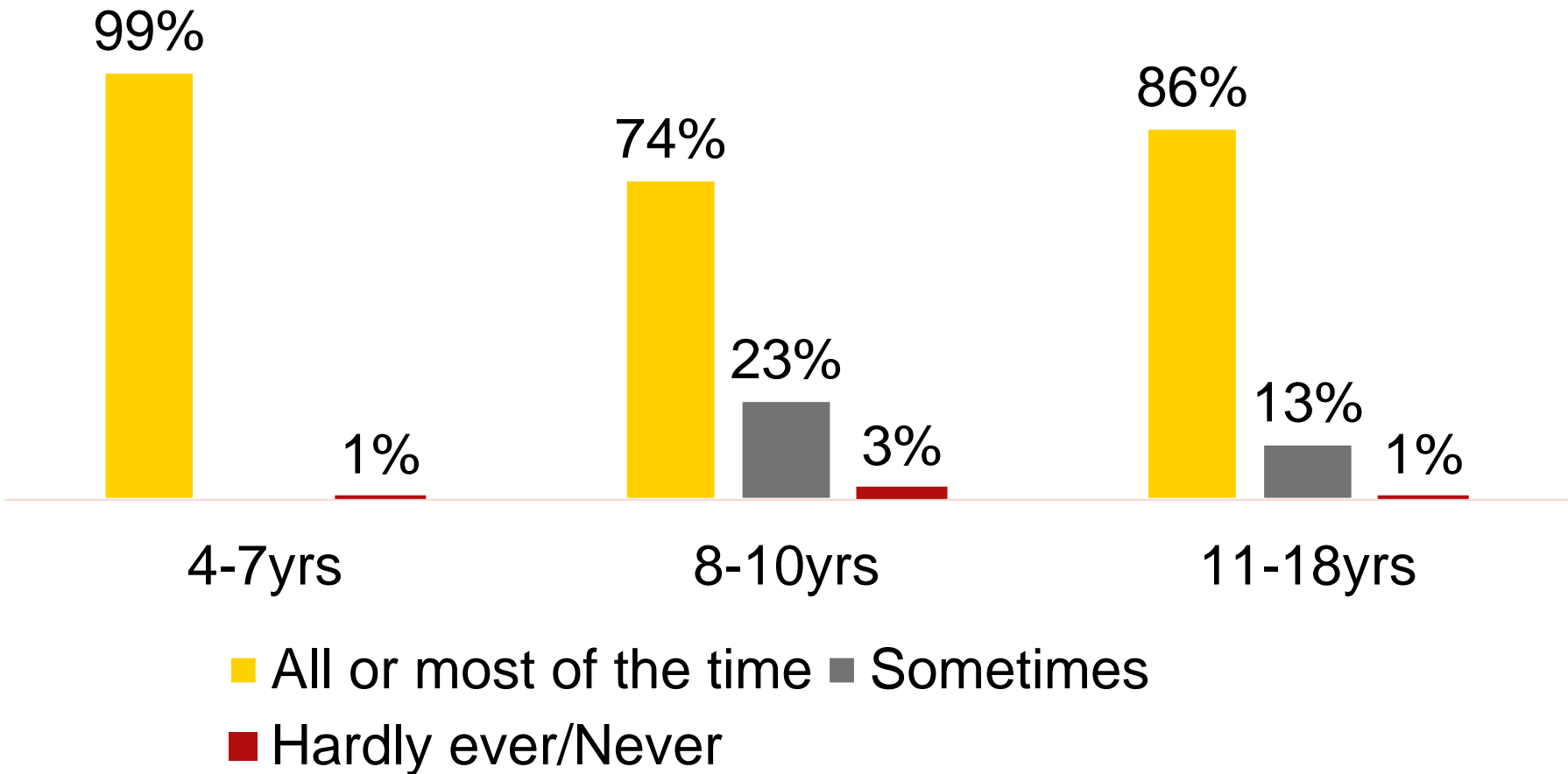
**6 (5%) low well-being**

***Overall responses suggested low well-being***

- All: no-one had explained why they were in care.
- 3 wanted to see family members or go home.
- 2 did not trust their social worker.
- 1 child did not know who their social worker was and felt that her carers did not notice how she was feeling.



# Feeling safe in placement



Analysis of The Children's World Survey shows that in England and Wales, 69% of 8 year olds, 76% of 10 year olds and 78% of 12 years olds felt 'totally safe' at home.

# Love?

- More than safety?

*I am happy in care cos  
I don't get beaten.  
(8-10yrs)*

*I know you think I am safer  
but I also more lonely without  
my family, even though my  
carers are great. (11-18yrs)*

- Relationships and a sense of belonging

*I love being in care  
because the people I  
live with are very nice  
and love me very much.  
(8-10yrs)*

*I am very grateful and  
extremely lucky to have  
loving and caring foster  
carers who have made me  
feel part of the family.  
(11-18yrs)*

# Important people

Foster  
brothers &  
sisters

Aunties &  
Uncles

Pets

Grandparents

Mum

Carers

Dad

Social  
workers

Friends

Teachers

Brother  
(s)

Leaving  
care  
PAs

Step parents

Sister(s)

# Carers

## Trusting carers (all / sometimes)

- 93% of young people (11-18yrs)
- 96% of children (4-10yrs)

## Carers notice feelings

- 89% of 11-18yrs
- 95% of 8-10yrs
- 92% of 4-7yrs

## Feeling settled

- majority were settled, 11-18yr olds who had more than 5 placements were more likely to record that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' felt settled

*I am more safe and happy and settled because I trust them (carers) very much.  
(8-10yrs)*

# What could love look like?

*It's good. I like [female carer's] cooking.  
(4-7yrs)*

*My foster carers can misunderstand me sometimes and they don't trust me and think I steal and lie, which is hurtful ...because I don't.  
(11-18yrs)*

*(Carer) shouts when I don't do as I'm told.  
(4-7yrs)*

*Foster carers to have more understanding about how I feel and what I've been through. (11-18yrs)*

*It's rubbish getting moved all the time, meeting new people, moving to a new area, having new social workers.  
(11-18yrs)*

*They treat me as their own child, spoil me to bits. They are overall the best foster parents I could ask for.  
(11-18yrs)*



# Family time

- 19% young people (11-18yrs) and 15% children (8-10yrs) had no contact with either parent.
- ¼ wanted **more frequent contact** with a parent.
- Wanting more contact associated with low well-being 4-10yr olds. (Most comments on this)
- 1/3 of young people (11-18yrs) felt they had too little contact with their siblings
- As in England, 15% of 8-10 year olds felt they had **too much** contact with siblings

*What would make care better? For my mummy to come to our house and have dinner with us.  
(4-7yrs)*

*I feel like it's the best day ever when I see my mother because I love seeing her. I'm very sad about not seeing my dad as I really miss him - he was very nice.  
(8-10yrs)*

# What impacts on family time?

*I would like to have contact in different places instead of the same place all the time. The place we go to is boring and there is not much to do. 8-10yrs*

*I would like to see more of my family not just mum and dad and my nan. 8-10yrs*

*I have never seen my dad. He did have a choice to have us, but he didn't want to. 8-10yrs*

*I have chosen not to associate myself with my birth family, for my own safety and protection and the emotional damage I have felt from them. However, as I grow older I begin to understand that I cannot change the past, and someday I may feel comfortable enough to visit them. 11-18yrs*

*I find it unfair that I can't see my biological brother and sister until they are 18 because they were adopted. 11-18yrs*

*Mum doesn't show up so contact is suspended. 11-18yrs*

*I only saw them once last year and I was supposed to get extra time added but this hasn't happened. 11-18yrs*

# Trusted adults

Had a trusted adult

- 89% young people (11-18yrs)
- 99% children (8-10yrs)

Young people **without a trusted adult in their lives were 5 times more likely to have low well-being**: a third of those with low well-being had no trusted adult.

*I'm different from other people who have real families ... people who are always going to be there for them until they are much older.  
11-18yrs*

# Friendships

Age group	Has at least one good friend
11-18yrs	313 (90.5%)
8-10yrs	166 (95%)
4-7yrs	110 (96%)

**Rydw i'n hapus gyda llawer o ffrindiau.**

**I'm happy with many friends.  
(4-7yrs)**



**1/10 looked after young people (11-18yrs) did not have a good friend.**

**General population:**  
3% of 14yr olds report not having a good friend (Millennium Cohort Study, 2015).

# What impacts on friendships?

Those who did not have a good friend were more likely to:

- Dislike school
- not have access to the Internet outside school

*It's difficult to tell your friends about your life.  
(11-18yrs)*

*Give me more independence with friends. (11-18yrs)*

- 11% of young people could not connect to the internet at home (compared to 2%-9% in general population)
- 16% of young people felt they couldn't do similar things to their friends

*Being in a proper school with children in it, so I am not lonely. (8-10yrs)*

*Being able to use the computer at home and to be able to walk with my friends outside school.  
(11-18yrs)*



# Feeling lonely

*'In last few weeks - I always/most of time feel lonely.'*



**1 in 5** care leavers (19%)  
Comparison data - 10% of 16-24yrs report being lonely often/always.<sup>3</sup>

*Constantly feeling like I'm exhausted emotionally and physically, however, not 100%. Struggling to get past this feeling. It's mostly an alone feeling like I can't go anywhere or do anything because of the way I look and having nobody.*

*'more support I felt alone as soon as I left care'*

*'...I am really quite a lonely person who just wants a family and friends to enjoy small pleasures that don't cost money.'*

# Examples of practice changes: Bromley

*“Bromley council has decided to make Tackling loneliness a key priority area to improve the lives of residents. The Council have chosen 3 target groups including Older People, first time mothers and Care Leavers. Our survey has helped us to put this area on the wider council agenda. We will also be part of the Tackling Loneliness Summit the council will be hosting in June. We wouldn't have been able to raise the profile of our kids without the help of the survey. I hope this anecdote will assist in encouraging others to participate”*

Head of Service – Children Looked After & Care Leavers, London Borough of Bromley, May 2019

- Our young people wanted a space to drop in and have a “chat” with someone if needed.



... Our House

# Take home messages

- Build a care systems that builds rather than breaks relationships
  - Help children settle by helping them understand why they are there
  - Review contact plans and arrangements (incl wider groups of people who are important to the child) and explain when and why not possible to see family
  - Consider impact decisions have on relationships including friendships – access to internet, opportunities to do similar things to friends, moving
- Ensure you regularly listen to how children feel both individually and as a group to inform care.

# Palace bound



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5imhodoM4Sk&list=PL9Rub76Tc1daLz5DahSOKjRqRBxvAyo8z&index=1>

**For enquiries about the Bright Spots project see:**

<http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/bright-spots>

**or contact:**

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A partnership supported by the Hadley Trust